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Journal

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URL: <http://www.abqjournal.com/food/500416food10-11-06.htm>

Wednesday, October 11, 2006

## Bend the Rules of Pairings

By **Jim Hammond**

*For the Journal*

WINE COUNTRY: Food and wine are often seen as complements to each other—and for good reasons.

While some wines are fine by themselves, most go best with food. The right food and wine pairing can be better than the sum of its parts.

A bad pairing, on the other hand, will mask certain qualities of the wine and contribute nothing to the flavors of the food.

Some examples: chances are the delicate flavors of a filet of sole will be lost in a bold Zinfandel, and spicy lasagna will drown out a Sauvignon Blanc. Better you should switch those food pairings around.

### **Making a match**

Some people find they prefer white wine to red wine or vice versa. However, even if you have discovered you have a preference, don't eliminate half your choices when it comes to matching the wine to the food. Most wine lovers find they will enjoy any wine more when it is consumed with properly matched food.

If we were forming a wine continuum, it would range from very sweet to very dry in both red and white varieties. Sweeter wines pair better with spicy foods, but subtler foods are best served by the drier varietals. When matched with the right foods, astringent wines no longer seem dry. These are basic rules, but rules can and should be broken if they don't work for you.

Another continuum would be delicate through heavier whites, to blush wines, to lighter reds to heavier reds. Some lighter red wines straddle the middle, permitting matches with stronger fish, like salmon, and more delicate meats. At both ends of this list would be sparkling wines and dessert wines.

### **Just desserts**

It probably comes as no surprise that dessert wines go with, well, desserts. However, many red wines, such as Cabernet Sauvignons, Syrahs, and Zinfandels, go great with chocolate desserts. That's why you'll often see a winery offering truffles when tasting their bigger reds. They already know how much the tasting centers of the tongue are stimulated by a dark chocolate, and they sell more wine.

Appetizers and mid-afternoon snacks are a great place to experiment. Try various cheeses with your wine; many are the perfect complement. Note how

different a glass of Chardonnay tastes with a mild goat cheese and an aged cheddar. Many cheeses bring out different qualities of the wine. Crackers and breads are good for clearing the palate when sampling different types of wine.

Putting two whites on the table with four distinct cheeses will expand the taste combinations. Avoid pairing with strong cheeses, such as Limburger. (I once sampled an extremely pungent Belgium cheese with a red Cotes du Rhone. The end result was an incredible taste, but not one I'd ever repeat.)

### **Anything goes**

Main courses require a bit of planning, and it should be noted that not every food needs a wine. I prefer a dark porter ale with Indian food, for example. But if you're serving lamb, consider a Pinot Noir— it is a match made in heaven.

Just remember, pairing rules are only guidelines, and red and white do overlap on a number of foods, such as turkey and salmon.

In fact, I guarantee you will find a wide variety of wine suggestions around Thanksgiving. The good thing about turkey is that you can serve sparkling wines, whites, blush wines and reds, and no one can deduct points for a rule violation. There aren't any. Salut!

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